

Cavell



Why Cavell?

In Cavell we recognise someone who was a pioneer of her profession first and foremost, helping to modernise nursing. She worked hard to become a leader in her field. However, her story is one which inspires: we see in this story integrity and courage to do the right thing, no matter what the consequences. Cavell put herself in danger to save lives and showed true bravery. In Cavell's story we recognise the sacrifices and tragic events that go on daily where there is conflict and suffering, and how the role of the Christian is to be a peacemaker.

Edith Cavell (4 Dec 1865-12 Oct 1915) was a British nurse who is celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers from both sides in World War I. She helped around 200 Allied soldiers escape German-occupied Belgium during the war, but was arrested, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. She was shot by a German firing squad.

She worked in Brussels pioneering modern nursing and was widely recognised as leading the profession before the War, leading the publication of a professional journal for nurses and training others in the field.

In November 1914, after the German occupation of Brussels, Cavell began sheltering wounded British soldiers and funnelling them out of the country to safety. In August 1915 she was arrested and held in prison for ten weeks, the last two of which were in solitary confinement. The British government attempted to intervene diplomatically to save Cavell, as did the US, however this did not aid her. She was executed by a firing squad of eight men at 7am on 12th October 1915.

Such was the significance of her life and death that she was given a memorial service at Westminster Abbey and buried at Norwich Cathedral; the King had to grant a special Order to allow someone to be buried in the grounds. Cavell became a figure for military propaganda in Britain and an icon for nursing, and she became the most prominent British female casualty of the First World War.

Cavell had a strong faith and was a member of the Church of England. This drove her attitude towards the soldiers on both sides of the war. She is recognised in the Church of England's Calendar of Saints, with her commemoration day being 12th October (although she is not canonised). There are numerous memorials over Europe for Cavell, including in St Martin's Place in London.